

Maalu Maalu: A Fishing Village With A Difference

Posted on



Sunrise on a misty morning at Maalu Maalu Resorts and Spas



Sunrise on the Passekudah Bay was a little unusual that morning. A vapoury white mist rolled over the ocean, its calm waters making soft splashes against the sand. Filtered through the smoky strands, the early-morning sunlight took on an ethereal glow and transferred the effect onto everything it touched. Emerging from the haze in the centre of the Bay was Maalu Maalu.

Words Haseena Razak Photographs Menaka Aravinda

The Passekudah Bay in the Batticaloa District, which can be reached via

Polonnaruwa from Colombo, apparently rarely ever experiences misty mornings, and is unlikely to do so again for a long time to come. As beautiful as the freak weather had made the morning, it was a relief when the mist dissipated as it had a chilly bite to it. The surroundings took on their customary appearance: a warm, tropical beachside complete with white sands and blue waters.

It is in the midst of this oceanfront haven that Maalu Maalu Resorts and Spas creates a snug shelter for holiday makers. Maalu Maalu opened in May 2011 as a pioneering presence in the region, the first of its kind on the Eastern coast of Sri Lanka. This one-of-a-kind eco hotel with modern comforts is the concept of Chandra Wickramasinghe, the Chairman and Managing Director of Connaissance de Ceylan. His characteristic style of constructing hotels to blend in with their natural environment – much like Culture Club, one of the first hotels in Dambulla to blend eco and cultural tourism – prevailed at Maalu Maalu Resorts and Spas in Passekudah too. At Culture Club, the tranquil ambience of a native village pervades through the property, and at Passekudah, Maalu Maalu is reminiscent of a common sight on the local beaches: a *Wadiya*, or traditional fishing village, albeit a rather grand one.

Little lights in the swimming pool gave it the appearance of a night sky adorned with twinkling stars

The idyllic Passekudah Bay itself has been renowned for its pristine beaches and crystal clear waters for decades. The allure of the region was immediately evident: this beach still held a natural charm and wrapped visitors in a pleasant sense of seclusion. So calm was the ocean that hardly any waves broke on the shore. The refreshingly warm waters only rose to shoulder level even far out at sea. On either side of the curving Bay, foamy water bubbled as small waves broke on the tips of the coral reef that spanned the length of the Bay. In the heart of the Bay, Maalu Maalu seemed in a sense to blend in with its surroundings.

The name Maalu Maalu itself holds a reference to the local fishermen. ‘Maalu! Maalu!’, meaning ‘Fish! Fish!’ is the phrase they cry out to attract buyers to their catch. Along the beach, a wooden walkway led towards the hotel. Chalets were arranged symmetrically on either side, their high triangular thatched roofs making a picturesque pattern. In the centre, the deep blue swimming pool shimmered. The crowd of roofs covered with dried coconut fronds was what held the strongest resemblance to a fishing village.

Despite the luxuries, the hotel has a cosy feeling that envelopes visitors as soon as

they enter. Upon arrival, Velayudan, who hails from the region, meets guests with a traditional greeting. Arms folded, he smiles softly and says, “*Vanakkam*” or “Welcome”. The kindness in his face and the crinkly smile-lines around his eyes indicate the genuine warmth typical of the local people.

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The chalets themselves exude a snug feeling that is complemented by the Kumbuk and Palmyrah wood used for the floors and headboards. Sourced from the locality, they too radiate a touch of the native culture coupled with the comforts of modern life.

The way of life of the locals in Passekudah revolves almost entirely around their age-old livelihood: fishing. At Maalu Maalu is the opportunity to experience and absorb as much of this tradition as possible. A short stroll along the beach leads to the fishing village where visitors can savour a taste of the customs and lifestyle of the local people. The more daring could even help fisher folk haul in their *ma-del* or fishing nets from the beach.

In addition to the local experience, the resort also offers guests a Jazz Bar and Club Jaadi, the hotel’s own nightclub. The dim lights and soothing strains of jazz at the bar induce a leisurely tranquillity. Club Jaadi, which will open even on the request of two guests, ensures a lively night of dancing. With the music blaring and the lights setting the tone, it’s hard to imagine that not far away lies the small, rural town of Passekudah. The Ayur Vie Spa, specialising in Ayurvedic massages and Shirodhara, is the epitome of rest and rejuvenation. Here, foot massages are best enjoyed with a relaxing view of the ocean.

Besides the scrumptious seafood dishes, it is the laidback seaside atmosphere that takes centre stage at Maalu Maalu’s restaurants. Karadiya and the White Sand Restaurant take on the ambience of their natural surroundings: starlit nights, balmy afternoons and brilliant mornings. What looks like a little shack by the swimming pool, is the Habala Restaurant, fashioned out of an old boat now turned into the restaurant, it holds a quaint charm.

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As the sun set behind the chalets of Maalu Maalu, casting pretty pinks and purples

across the sky, the full moon rose over the ocean, its light bouncing off the waters. The hotel is situated in an enchanting location and as night fell the muted lights turned on one by one and the ambience turned truly magical. Little lights in the swimming pool gave it the appearance of a night sky adorned with twinkling stars. With the full moon brightening up the real sky above, the effect was enthralling. It was the perfect setting to unwind after a day of indulging in the pleasures of Maalu Maalu Resorts and Spas.

In the fishing village nearby, the fishermen had only just begun their day of work. Soon, their boats would be far out at sea looking like bobbing points of light on the horizon. The lives of the fisher folk have been intrinsically linked to the ocean and these beaches since time immemorial. Herein lies the lure of Passekudah: the charm of a landscape virtually unchanged for generations.

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